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## Men at Home, Men and Home in Two Anglophone Novels by Indian Women Writers

Maryam Mirza

The crisis of female identity, patriarchal oppression and bourgeois women's restrictive roles within the confines of the domestic sphere – an environment deemed 'female' and 'feminine' in patriarchal societies – have been the central tropes of postcolonial Anglophone fiction by Indian women novelists. These thematic concerns permeate the works of female diasporic writers (such as Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni) as well as fiction by women novelists based in India (for instance, Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan).<sup>1</sup> Male identity politics and notions of home in postcolonial writings, however, are mostly evoked in the context of 'homelands' or 'home-countries'. These writings are often inextricably linked to the 'discourse on nationalism and other so-called masculine, public arenas' (George 1996, 19).<sup>2</sup> Feminist geographers too have primarily examined domestic spaces with respect to female identities and their discontents. Such an approach to spatiality, as McDowell (2001, 182) explains, has often entailed 'relying too heavily on a singular masculinity, defined as the unchanging "One" against which multiple and contested femininities are constructed'. Recently, however, geographers have begun to explore the relationship between masculinities and home (Gorman-Murray 2008). In this article, I examine the nuanced relationship that the male characters have with the domestic sphere in two novels by Indian women writers: *The God of Small Things*<sup>3</sup> (1997) by Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur's *Home* (2006). I focus on the representation of two bourgeois male characters, Estha and Vicky, whose difficult journey from childhood to adulthood cannot be understood without an in-depth analysis of their ambiguous positioning within domestic and familial spaces in contemporary India. Of particular relevance is the depiction of the feelings of homelessness and alienation experienced by Estha and Vicky. The material dwelling place, the family, and concepts of home are central to my reading of both the characters. Moving away from men/women, dominant/oppressed binaries, my analysis demonstrates that home in these novels is a complex arena for men belonging to (upper) middle-class families, requiring not only a subtle understanding of patriarchy and how it affects men, but also of how male dominance and privilege in society intersect, and are complicated by, other hierarchies including that of age and class.

The theoretical framework of this article lies at the intersection of masculinity/men's studies, feminist geographies and literary geography. With respect to the last, my analysis can be seen to subscribe to both "literary" literary geography', which involves 'using spatial theory and

geographical data to support the interpretation of a text’ as well as “‘geographical” literary geography’, which is concerned with ‘analysing the ways in which literary texts articulate and produce geographical knowledge’ (Hones 2013, 105). Specifically, my interpretation of *The God of Small Things* and *Home* draws on the *gendered* aspects of spatial theories vis-à-vis the domestic arena, and I am interested in exploring the ways in which the two novels, through the characters of Estha and Vicky, articulate and produce nuanced ‘geographical knowledge’ about male ‘domestic’ identities in India.

### **Home and gendered identities**

Recent conceptualizations of ‘home’ and approaches to gendered identities by various schools of thought inform my reading of male domestic identities in the two novels. I outline some of this scholarship here. In broad terms, traditional Marxist frameworks have chosen either not to address home at all or have ‘deemed it a hindrance to progressive social change’ since it provides respite to (male) labourers working within a capitalist system, and thus ensures its perpetuation (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 11). This is in contrast to the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* ([1958] 1994) who sees home as an idyllic material dwelling place of comfort and repose that is central to human creativity. Drawing attention to the unwaged labour performed by women within the home, socialist feminists have challenged ‘the Marxist notion that the home is only a site of social reproduction, not a workplace’ (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 16). Western feminists have focused instead on the ways in which home is a gendered space, marked by inequitable power relations between men and women within the family, making it a site of oppression, violence and abuse in patriarchal societies. It is a place that is more likely to be associated with emotional turmoil and feelings of isolation for women than men (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 25). This perspective has been contested by African American and postcolonial feminists, notably, hooks (1990, 42) demonstrates that in a culture of white supremacy, the ‘homeplace’ can be an effective site of resistance for black women.

Without glossing over these and other significant differences among the diverse feminist approaches to the question of home, it is evident that the engagement of feminists with patriarchal conceptions of domestic spaces, and the debates among the various schools of feminism have been instrumental in alerting us not only to the gendered nature of home but also to the fluid, often contradictory, women’s experiences within the domestic sphere. Considerably less scholarly attention has been paid to the ways in which home can be a problematic gendered space for men as well.<sup>4</sup> As McDowell (1999, 26) warns us, it is a mistake ‘to assume that gender issues are “women’s issues”’; after all, men too are gendered.

Cultural theorists such as Connell (2005) and Mac an Ghaill (1996) have recently shed light on how 'gendered power relations create relational hierarchies *among* men as well as between men and women' (Gormon-Murray 2008, 368). Significantly, instead of seeing masculinity as being synonymous with hegemony, Connell (2005) highlights the many forms that masculinity can take, and as Berg and Longhurst (2003, 352) point out, these multiple masculinities are both 'temporally and geographically contingent'. My reading of the two texts engages with Connell's (2005, 80–81) discussion of 'marginalized' or 'subordinated' masculinities, within the specific context of domestic space. Gay masculinity is arguably 'the most conspicuous' form of subordinated masculinity, but it is not the only kind, and my analysis addresses the ways in which heterosexual men and boys 'are expelled from the circle of legitimacy' in the two novels (Connell 2005, 79).

I analyse Roy's and Kapur's portrayal of how various social hierarchies are experienced within the home by the male characters over several decades and how these experiences decisively inform their identities. While domestic spaces and the family in India have been 'a long-standing site for reinforcing and perpetuating male privilege and entitlement', the domestic arena in both the novels emerges as a complex site of contestation, of exploitation and of alienation for men (Srivastava 2013, np). As I illustrate, the marginalized masculinities of Estha and Vicky are both informed by, and result in, subaltern male domestic geographies. Jazeel (2014, 95–96) employs the term 'subaltern geographies' to refer to 'ways of thinking spatially that may be considered lower ranking in the context of disciplinary geography's Eurocentric hegemony'. My use of the term in this article evokes 'the geographical imaginations of lower ranking, lower caste or class, social groups' (Jazeel 2014, 95), specifically young, heterosexual men belonging to bourgeois families who are nonetheless marginalized in the domestic sphere. I also mobilize this meaning to designate the socially constructed subaltern spaces and roles that these men are compelled to inhabit within the home.

### **'Lucky rich boy with porketmunny'**

In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Estha, the son of an upper class, upper caste Syrian Christian woman Ammu, is confronted with shifting domestic spaces at various stages of his life. He is first, along with his twin sister, brought by Ammu to the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandparents' house, following Ammu's divorce from the twins' alcoholic father. Given the social stigma attached to a divorced woman, especially in 1960s India, Ammu and her children are an unwanted presence in the house. As the text explains, her aunt Baby Kochamma 'subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position

in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all' (GOST 45). The stigma is intensified because Ammu had chosen to marry a Hindu. After the marriage collapses, both Estha and Rahel are considered 'doomed' by virtue of being fatherless and 'Half-Hindu Hybrids' (GOST 45). They are reminded not only by Baby Kochamma but also their uncle Chacko that they 'lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House' where they 'had no right to be' (GOST 45). Emboldened by Estha's vulnerability as a young child and his class marginality within her employer's family, even the maid Maria Kuchu, who is socially subordinated by both her lower class positioning and her gendered status as a woman in a class-riddled patriarchal society, does not hesitate from subjecting him to cruel taunts: 'Tell your mother to take you to your father's house' (GOST 83).

Both Estha and his sister are haunted by the memory of their parents pushing them away from each other like 'billiard balls' when they temporarily became pawns in the ugliness preceding the divorce (GOST 84). But in Roy's novel it is Estha, the male twin and not Rahel, his sister, who seeks to (re)create a home outside of the Ayemenem House where they are pointedly made to feel a burden. Having discovered the 'History House', an abandoned, dilapidated property across the Meenachal river, Estha as a child tries to make its back veranda 'their home away from home', furnishing it with a grass mat and most of their toys (GOST 264). This act highlights at once his alienation within his grandparents' house and the profound need to belong that is tied in with spaces and material objects. Moreover, the Meenachal River and the tiny hut belonging to Velutha, Ammu's lower class, untouchable lover, appear to be more of a home for the young twins than upper class domestic spaces. Following the death of Estha's English cousin and the discovery of Ammu and Velutha's relationship, Ammu is banished from the house by her family. While Rahel is allowed to stay on, Estha is uprooted and 'Returned' to his father, who had made no attempt to stay in touch with his children since the divorce (GOST 31). The separation entails a wrenching apart from his mother and sister. Estha also has to leave behind a familiar, welcoming landscape embodied in Velutha in whose violent murder he was manipulated into becoming an accessory.

While living with his father and stepmother, upon finishing school, Estha refused to pursue higher education and instead, of his own volition, starting doing housework:

He did the sweeping, swabbing and all the laundry. He learned to cook and shop for vegetables. Vendors in the bazaar [...] grew to recognize him and would attend to him amidst the clamouring of their other customers [...] At meal times when he wanted something, he got up and helped himself. (GOST 11)

Domestic chores, according to the logic of traditional division of labour, are a woman's 'natural' calling; 'financially unrewarded', housework is 'correspondingly devalued' in patriarchal societies (McDowell 1999, 73). Estha's decision to embrace what is socially constructed as 'women's work' is a source of embarrassment and discomfort for his family. His preoccupation with household chores coincides with his withdrawal from the world, a withdrawal which is both physical and verbal: Estha 'occupied very little space in the world' (GOST 11). As a young boy, Estha's sexual assault in a very public space – a cinema – by another male, the OrangeDrink LemonDrink Man, contributes to his withdrawal from the world. This episode fills him with guilt, rendering him incapable of speaking about it with the adults in the family. It also plays a role in his rejection of 'the public life of men' as well as in his refusal of 'the traditional privileges of masculinity', which exclude any expectation of participation in household tasks. Estha voluntarily takes on a role akin to that of a 'family servant' (Mullaney 2002, 59). His retreat from the so-called public sphere is mirrored and doubled by his subsequent retreat from traditional male roles in the home. Even after his return as an adult to the Ayemenem House, he occupies very little space and more importantly, makes no attempt to assume the role of the dominant male within the family despite being surrounded by women.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Estha's sexuality contributes to his marginality. While not depicted to be homosexual, he arguably does transgress normative, hegemonic male heterosexuality, not only because of his asexual existence as a young man but also because his sole sexual encounter in the narrative takes place with his sister and then too, it is Rahel who initiates physical intimacy (GOST 93).

When the OrangeDrink LemonDrink Man assaults Estha, he punishes him both sexually and verbally for his supposed class and gender privilege: 'Think of all the poor people who have nothing to eat or drink. You're a lucky rich boy, with porketmunny and a grandmother's factory to inherit. You should Thank God that you have no worries' (GOST 104–105). Of course, it is his uncle Chacko who has legal claim to the factory: neither Ammu nor Estha, as the daughter's son, has any inheritance rights over the property (GOST 57). The cold drink vendor's spiteful and deeply erroneous reading of Estha's social/ familial positioning serves as a powerful indictment of simplistic assumptions made about male class privilege based on public markers, such as clothing or proficiency in English (the language of the elites in India), which give little indication of the complex ways that gender and class identities are lived in domestic spaces. Estha's voluntary involvement in housekeeping lends itself to several interpretations. It is certainly a way of earning his keep in his father's house where it seems he perceives himself as an encumbrance, just as he did in his grandparents' house (GOST 11). And, as I argue above, this choice of what is conventionally perceived to be women's work, can be seen as an extension of

his retreat from the world and part of a conscious decision to live a subordinated masculinity. But perhaps as a young man, ridden with a sense of homelessness and lack of belonging, these domestic activities also work to provide a sort of anchorage, making his desolation somewhat tolerable. When his father decides to emigrate to Australia, Estha becomes homeless again and is 're-Returned' to his mother's family home where he continues his participation in household activities; in particular, he takes to doing the laundry (GOST 9). The act of washing clothes can be read as a desire to wash away what he perceives to be his sins as well as the profound pain, the 'hideous grief' of the past which, it can be argued, the incestuous sexual act with his sister also seeks to alleviate (GOST 328).

Estha acquires another 'female' role, that of nursing, when he tends to Khubchand, his incontinent seventeen-year-old mongrel. As Friedman (2005, 198) points out, in contrast to his unruly, rebellious sister, Estha is obedient and servile. It is almost as if he is performing 'a kind of exaggerated femininity as penance'. Indeed, Roy repeatedly challenges stereotypical constructions of masculinities and femininities in her novel. As I have discussed elsewhere, Velutha's character, despite his intensely masculine physique and beauty defies conventional definitions of masculinity by possessing both physical strength and tenderness towards Ammu and the twins, in his ability to fashion wood and to cook.<sup>6</sup> If Estha does not subscribe to traditional roles and male behaviour, Rahel too, during her school years is seen as a gender-anomaly by those around her (it was 'as if she did not know how to be a girl' (GOST 17)). Estha's penchant for walking also gestures to his ambivalent relationship with domestic spaces. We learn that he started going for long walks following Khubchand's death and it is a habit that he continues once he has been 're-Returned' to the Ayemenem House. While Estha's ambulatory habit can be read as a desire to walk away from a place which is devoid of the usual positive connotations associated with the word 'home' or indeed, to make himself less present in domestic spaces, I find it also strongly suggestive of a search for another kind of home, a ritualistic acting out of a journey 'back' to a home which, rather than a geographic site, is a place of genuine emotional linkages. Home, then, in Roy's novel appears to be 'a place to escape to and a place to escape from', both for the male and female characters (George 1996, 9). 'The movement between homes', Sara Ahmed writes (1999, 331), 'allows Home to become a fetish, to become separated from the particular worldly space of living *here*, through the possibility of some memories and the impossibility of others'. While Ahmed's (1999) observation applies to transnational displacements, it holds true even when the displacement does not entail the crossing of national borders. In particular, Estha's ambling suggests that for him home is

elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going: home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place. (Ahmed 1999, 331) Although the profound sorrow of his life is rooted in home-spaces, for Estha the search for Home, defining his sense of self, never ceases.

### **Vicky – 'the adopted son'**

In Manju Kapur's *Home*, Vicky's place in his maternal grandfather's 'joint-family'<sup>7</sup> house located in Delhi is also constantly contested. Unlike the 'private space associated with the nuclear family', home in a joint-family living arrangement, 'continues to preserve the traditional social patterns in which the claims of an exclusively personal domain get restricted by the tradition-bound norms laid down by the collective' (Chauhan 2007, 242). Vicky's positioning within an expanding familial collective, the Lal family, is central to our understanding of his character.

As an eleven-year-old boy, Vicky is brought to his grandfather's house after, what appears to be, his mother's murder by his father's family. As both Roy and Kapur powerfully demonstrate, while 'son preference' is a pervasive cultural norm in India, it does not simplistically supersede other hierarchies, gendered or otherwise. Being a male child secures neither Estha nor Vicky a privileged positioning in the home: they are both deeply marginalized within their families.

Vicky, who was technically the first grandchild in the family, 'did not count' as the first grandchild and his birth did not elicit the kind of 'jubilation' that the birth of a son's son did, because a daughter's son does not 'augment the male line' (*Home* 14–15). It is important to note that Estha and Vicky's marginality largely, though not solely, stems from the fact that they are living in their *maternal* grandparents' house. Thus, their masculine identities bear the marks of their female, and what are considered to be socially inferior, roots in a patriarchal society; as Kapur points out, 'blood lines from the female side can only whisper' (*Home* 111). Painfully aware of his precarious position in the joint-family house, Vicky is however grateful for the rare occasions when his deceased mother's name is mentioned by the family as it provides him with a degree of reassurance that, through her, 'he had a rightful place in this house' (*Home* 43).

Vicky is constantly shuttled between the 'upstairs' family where his younger maternal uncle lives with his wife and children and the 'downstairs' inhabited by his grandparents and eldest uncle and aunt who are childless at the beginning of the text: neither of the two families want him.

Vicky, like Estha, is treated like an encumbrance and Banwari Lal, his grandfather, is the only member of the family who feels genuine warmth towards him, with his aunt Sona actively wishing him dead or 'at the very least out of the house' (*Home* 45). With his advancing years and subsequent declining power as a patriarch, Banwari Lal increasingly submits to his sons'



decisions who consider Vicky's well-being as secondary compared to that of their own children. Consequently, the space that Banwari Lal is allowed to give Vicky within the home too becomes limited, which highlights the significance of the role played by age in understanding domestic masculinities. Unlike his cousins living in the same house, Vicky is sent to a poor quality school and is made to work at the family cloth shop. He welcomes the opportunity of working at the shop as it allows him to imagine a less bleak future for himself; it does not, however, alleviate his feelings of homelessness: 'As the children grew, Vicky hovered uneasily between shop and home, between upstairs and downstairs, between his grandparents and his aunts. By the time he was fifteen he was moody and gangly. He looked as though he had worms'. (*Home* 50) Bachelard ([1958] 1994, 7) muses: 'always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle' and 'life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house'. For hooks, writing from a black feminist perspective, home as a private space carries positive connotations, especially with respect to hostile public spaces. In sharp contrast to the racism of the 'outside' world, she writes that 'it was there on the inside, in that "homeplace" most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits' (hooks 1990, 42). These divergent nurturing aspects of home are completely absent from the spaces that Vicky has to call home, where he faces emotional rejection as well as physical expulsion. The Lal clan justify sending the teenage Vicky back to his father's house in Bareilly by defining the male child's home as necessarily requiring the presence of his father: 'Vicky's home was here, with his father' (*Home* 78). This observation echoes Ammu's words when she is forced by her family to 'return' Estha to his father. Perhaps she is seeking to find comfort in a patriarchal truth and to make the separation relatively palatable: "Maybe they're right," Ammu's whisper said. "Maybe a boy does need a Baba" (GOST 31). Both Estha and Vicky are sent away by adults, without regard for their wishes, which underscores their marginality as children. Moreover, neither for Estha (as we saw above) nor for Vicky does the paternal house evoke a sense of belonging. Vicky's father's house is a 'hateful' place for him (*Home* 78). It is the site of the domestic abuse that his mother suffered and her eventual dowry-related murder. Little wonder then that Vicky runs away from his father's house and back to Delhi, despite being aware that he is not wanted by his mother's family (*Home* 78).

Descriptions of the home as a warm all-encompassing bosom, such as in Bachelard's ([1958] 1994) work, also problematically equate domestic love and warmth with the presence of women. In charting the hostile reaction of the women of the house to Vicky's presence, Kapur explodes the myth of innate maternal instincts and propensity for kindness that all women are supposed to 'naturally' possess. For instance, his aunt Sona draws back 'in revulsion' when he is

first brought to the family house (*Home* 21). neither Vicky's parental nor his grandfather's house represents a warm, welcoming environment, which allows him 'to dream in peace', as Bachelard puts it ([1958] 1994, 9). Indeed, it is telling that all his daydreaming takes place away from domestic spaces. It is at the cloth shop, where he works alongside his grandfather and where he possesses some semblance of autonomy, and greater access to food (of which he is deprived at home by the women of the family), that Vicky indulges in reverie. 'He felt this was just the beginning. Money would follow. Lying on the floor in the afternoons, next to the assistant's feet, hidden by the counter, he saw the writing on the wall' (*Home* 48).

Vicky clearly does not share the same class positioning as his other (male) cousins. He is seen and treated by Sona, once she bears two children, as a servant boy, a sort of unpaid babysitter for her son (*Home* 51). At several points in the narrative, Vicky's class identity and age appear to be more central to our understanding of his exploitation at home, than his gender. McDowell (1999, 93–94) claims that 'spatial divisions may not be associated with gender at all in some places, but rather mark class or status divisions, descent or affinity, marriage or siblingship'. But it is perhaps more helpful to consider Vicky's gender and spatial positioning in conjunction with his marginalized class and age identities, which produce a subordinated masculinity, and by extension, a subaltern geography.

Vicky's subordinated masculinity as a young boy and his consequent subaltern geographical positioning, however, needs to be qualified in the light of his relationship with his male and female cousins. As an adolescent, Vicky's talent for sports, for instance, makes him a role model for his male cousins: 'Vicky's skill with a cricket bat, his dexterity at gulli danda and pithoo, established his reputation, and by implication, raised Ajay and Vijay's stock in the neighbourhood' (*Home* 32). Sport, as Waitt (2004, 42) explains, has conventionally been 'the training ground in heteronormative masculinity'. Vicky's sexual abuse of his cousin Nisha, a toddler, further complicates our understanding of his relationship with domestic spaces as well as our reading of the masculinities that he represents: his character can be seen to embody both subordinated and hegemonic masculinities, and at times, the distinction between the two becomes blurred. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell (2005, 77) is 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'. Without in any way 'justifying' Vicky's abuse of his cousin, which certainly is an exercise of hegemonic male power, it can perhaps be contended that his actions are partly a *consequence* of his marginality, his homelessness within the joint-family house. While not as consistently as Estha's character, in certain respects, Vicky's disposition also defies

conventional expectations of male behaviour. In particular, when Nisha is born, unlike his other male cousins, Vicky takes an interest in the infant and wants to spend time with her. Ajay and Vijay, who are 'completely bored' by the baby, are unable to understand 'how a cricketer like their cousin would even want to hold her' (*Home* 44).

Vicky's initial feelings for Nisha are nothing if not tender and brotherly. Alienated from all the other family members, with Nisha, Vicky 'could pretend that she was his real sister and there was no distinction between them' (*Home* 43). But later, by repeatedly molesting Nisha, Vicky makes the family home a place fraught with insecurity *both for himself and her* and is arguably attempting to erode the distinctions separating them from each other. When Nisha becomes his victim, Vicky is no longer the only family member who is neither safe nor protected in the home. Taken together, *Home* and *The God of Small Things* reveal the complexity of the politics of sexual abuse and male power by compelling us to consider 'men's experience of violence beyond a victim/perpetrator binary' (Meth 2014, 160). Moreover, sexual abuse cannot be reduced to the dynamics of class power. Young upper-(middle)-class boys can be both the victims and perpetrators of such abuse.

Vicky's spatial outsiderhood becomes even more pronounced when his marriage is arranged by his mother's family and he and his wife Asha are relegated to a makeshift construction on the *barsati*, the roof of the Lal House. The *barsati* can be described as what Jazeel (2005, 239) calls a 'domestic non-space'. It is customarily, as Hosagrahar (2005, 155) explains, 'a light structure or open pavilion on top of residential structures used for sleeping in the summer'. This structure, by its very name, evokes *barsat* (the monsoon season), and gestures to its primarily temporary nature. Once Vicky becomes a husband, and later a father, he appears to exercise a modicum of power over his spouse and son in the *barsati*. But it is Asha, her positioning in the marital home tied inextricably to Vicky's, who understands and eventually articulates the link between domestic space, social status and their future prospects:

She could not help but notice the general meanness of her own quarters compared to the rest of the house [...] The barsati was enough for her needs, but it was too separate [...]

She did not know how to convey her uneasiness to her husband. How to ask him, where do you belong, tell me so that I can place myself there. (*Home* 103)

According to Derné (2000, 164) in his ethnographic study of masculinity, modernity and cinema in contemporary India, 'the feeling that one lacks power to control one's destiny is not limited to the poor ... middle-class and upper-middle-class men feel helpless in the face of hierarchical families'. Indeed, a sharp, if tacit, hierarchy is in place among the Lal grandsons, with Vicky consigned to the bottom-most rung. When the two brothers decide to demolish the house and

construct a new one with separate apartments for their families and their children's families, Vicky is purposely excluded from this configuration. As George (1996, 9) points out, 'one distinguishing feature of places called home is that they are built on select inclusions'. Now that Banwari Lal is dead, the two brothers no longer see themselves responsible for Vicky's welfare. The overlap between the so-called public and private spheres is striking in Kapur's novel since Vicky is employed in the family business: his marginality in one sphere echoes and reinforces his subalternity in the other. Vicky's uncles see him as 'debris', an insalubrious presence not only inside the shop but also the family home, convinced that 'a sister's child was not a healthy thing to have living in the family' (*Home* 110).

When he is told to vacate the roof so that the house can be demolished, Asha provides Vicky with a vocabulary to articulate his feelings about the injustice he has suffered in his mother's family's house. And it is again Asha who proposes a line of action: 'We can refuse to vacate the roof. This is our home, we have rights over it' (*Home* 175). Arguably only his wife, an intimate outsider, who did not grow up in that house, could have sown the seeds of rebellion in Vicky. Asha's role in convincing him to fight for his financial and spatial rights throws into doubt Vicky's hegemonic masculinity within the marriage. Despite his unhappiness with the way he was treated by the Lal family, before Asha's arrival, he never thought to rebel. His hesitation to leave the family home indicates also the extent to which his sense of self is tied in with the Lal house. Moreover, Vicky was perhaps seduced by the notion of familial solidarity that a joint-family is meant to epitomize, believing that they would never throw him out:

Vicky looked at his wife. She smiled at him. He would never have thought of establishing possession of the roof. But in this dog-eat-dog world who else was there to look after you but yourself? He had been exploited all these years, his measly return being board, lodging and a pittance for salary. (*Home* 175)

The lack of familial solidarity is brought to the fore in the text when we discover that his cousins are considering contracting a thug to break Vicky's legs if he refuses to vacate the roof. Violence then, or the threat of it, can be vital to maintaining the boundaries of the family home. We can recall, for instance, Ammu's brutal eviction from the Ayemenem House for having 'brought the family to its knees' by having an affair with an untouchable (GOST 258). In *Home*, with support and encouragement from his wife, Vicky is able to extract 10 lakh rupees from the Lal family in exchange for his permanent departure. It is worth noting that Vicky and Asha's new home does not feature in the text as they vanish both from the narrative and from the family house. This double absence underscores the degree to which domestic co-habitation, no matter how acrimonious and tenuous, is central to an individual's membership of the joint-family whose tale

Kapur has chosen to narrate. Vicky's association with the Lal clan is permanently severed after his coerced exit from the house and he re-emerges only as a ghostly figure in Nisha's consciousness as she continues to be haunted by the sexual abuse she suffered at his hands. Rather than simply a place where middle-class, heterosexual men find refuge from the oppressive world of work and exercise unlimited power over women, the bourgeois home can be as ambivalent an environment for men as it is for women. In depicting the complex intersection of gender, age and class identities within domestic spaces, Roy and Kapur bring to the fore the diverse ways in which home is intimately, instead of only tangentially, tied in with male identity politics. Indeed, identity, whether male or female, 'is shaped by the individual's experience of home' (George 1996, 26). And this experience, as we have seen in both *The God of Small Things* and *Home*, entails the often-painful negotiation of not only male-female relationships but also relationships between men. For both Estha and Vicky, the feeling of alienation, of homelessness within their designated homes brings in its wake specific enduring trauma which cannot be effaced by the systemic privilege bestowed upon fathers and sons, brothers and husbands in a patriarchal society.

## Notes

1. A few of the many texts that examine these themes include: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1990) and *That Long Silence* (1988) by Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) by Anita Desai and Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* ([1977] 1996).
2. See for example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* ([1981] 2008) and Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988).
3. All references to Roy's *The God of Small Things* in the article will be followed by the abbreviation GOST.
4. John Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999) is one of the very few book-length works devoted exclusively to exploring masculine identity politics within the domestic sphere. Wider ranging studies on spatiality and masculinity include *Spaces of Masculinities* (2005) and *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (1996).
5. By the time Estha is 're-Returned', his uncle Chacko has moved to Canada.
6. I have analysed, in detail, the construction of Velutha's masculinity in an essay entitled, 'Intimacy across Caste and

Class Boundaries in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*' (Mirza 2015).

7. The Lal Family is an example of what Kolenda (1968, 347) classifies as a 'lineal-collateral joint family' since the household consists of the parents, their two married sons as well as the unmarried children of each couple.

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